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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000504

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DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: INDEPENDENT SHIA STRESSES NEED TO
ACTIVATE, NOT ORGANIZE, SHIA

REF: A. BEIRUT 391

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 358

[1](#)C. BEIRUT 392

Classified By: CDA. Michele J. Sison for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Former Ambassador Khalil al-Khalil, an anti-Hizballah Shia from Tyre who also opposes Speaker Nabih Berri's Amal Movement, complains that he and other independent Shia have no voice in the government. He appealed for U.S. support in "activating" independent Shia, but stressed that he was not prepared to form a political group, instead preferring to maintain his status as an independent. He said he is amenable to working with March 14, but does not believe its leaders are serious about politically allying with independent Shia. End summary.

NO ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT

[1](#)2. (C) In an April 9 luncheon hosted by would-be presidential candidate Charles Chidiac and attended by Ambassador Khalil al-Khalil, an anti-Hizballah Shia from Tyre, his cousin Kassem Khalil, and AmCit businessman Reed Clarke, Ambassador Khalil told PolOff and LES Political Assistant that independent Shia have no voice in the government and that their representation is completely controlled by Hizballah or Speaker Nabih Berri's Amal Movement. He explained that because he opposes both of these Shia political parties, he is unable to participate as a minister in the government.

OTHER SHIA MAKING MISTAKES

[1](#)3. (C) Khalil, who attended Charge's March 13 dinner for independent Shia (Ref A), emphasized that he is 100 percent anti-Hizballah, driving home his point by saying "I am successful if I can convince you to be as anti-Hizballah as me!" (Comment: Khalil is known to have organized militias associated with Israel during Lebanon's civil war. End comment.) Boasting that, despite his stance, he still has freedom of movement when he is in the south, he said that another independent Shia leader, Ahmad Assad, is making "a big mistake" through his regular public statements against Hizballah. Assad is drawing too much attention to himself, Khalil commented, which is costing him support and causing him to restrict his movements. He characterized his

relationship with Assad as "good" despite their families' feuding history (which he pronounced over but with lingering tensions) though at the same time, he remained disinterested in joining forces.

ALLYING WITH MARCH 14

¶4. (C) Referring to his family's history of working with Christians, Khalil said he speaks to and has positive relations with many of the March 14 leaders. (Note: Khalil mentioned that his father "created" former President Camille Chamoun's National Liberal Party while Camille was president, and then held a top position in the party once Camille's term ended. End note.) However, he is hesitant to formally ally with March 14, saying that March 14 would not accept him (although we note that he was one of the few Shia who attended the March 14 convention (Ref C) with an honorary front-row seat).

ACTIVATE, NOT ORGANIZE, SHIA

¶5. (C) When pushed by the luncheon guests to articulate how the U.S. can support Khalil, he shied away from requesting funding, in contrast to what we hear from Assad, (Ref B) and said he was not prepared to form a political party or formally join a political alliance. He stressed that there is a difference between activating Shia and organizing them, and he preferred the former. Instead of forming a political party, Khalil said that he would like to see various independent Shia leaders, allied by a common theme of providing an alternative voice to Hizballah and Amal, pursuing their own activities, but in coordination with each other. The U.S. can assist in activating the leaders. In

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this way, he argued, a group is formed from the ground up, rather than imposing a group onto the people.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) It is clear Khalil wants to preserve his independence, but at the same time is willing to engage at a greater level with March 14. However, he does not want to be the one to approach March 14, and has discounted March 14's overtures to date, citing his recent meeting with Social Affairs Minister Nayla Mouawad, who reportedly said to him, "We need you!" Khalil told us he interpreted her plea as mere words. While interested in general U.S. support in activating independent Shia leaders, Khalil does not appear to have specific ideas, beyond hints for our assistance in facilitating meetings with March 14 leaders. According to Senior LES Political Advisor, Khalil does not wield any influence in the Shia community.

¶7. (C) Ambassador Khalil makes a good point: activating independent Shia may be a better course of action than trying to help them formally organize. Lebanon's independent Shia are not a monolithic group and we recognize that a one size fits all approach is not the way to go. The Embassy will continue to use an existing MEPI partnership with the International Republican Institute (IRI) to quietly explore program initiatives with a variety of interlocutors. We will also encourage March 14 to reach out in a meaningful way to Lebanon's independent Shia. End comment.

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